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Friday, June 9, 2000

Statement from Attorney General John Cornyn regarding death penalty cases:

"It has been eight weeks since I first identified problems associated with the testimony of Dr. Walter Quijano, an expert witness in the capital murder trial of Victor Hugo Saldano. As I explained in a filing before the United States Supreme Court on May 3, it is inappropriate to allow race to be considered as a factor in our criminal justice system. On June 5, the United States Supreme Court agreed. The people of Texas want and deserve a system that affords the same fairness to everyone. I will continue to do everything I can to assure Texans of our commitment to an equitable criminal justice system.

"After a thorough audit of cases in our office, we have identified eight more cases in which testimony was offered by Dr. Quijano that race should be a factor for the jury to consider in making its determination about the sentence in a capital murder trial.

"Six of these eight cases are similar to that of Victor Hugo Saldano. We have sent letters to opposing counsel and to the local prosecutors involved advising them of our findings. Two of these eight cases are dissimilar to the Saldano case. In one, the defendant is not a member of a racial group included in Dr. Quijano's statistical model. In the other, the prosecution did not introduce race as a factor.

"In addition, my office has reviewed case files for all executions in Texas since 1982 and we have not found any cases in which a defendant was executed on the basis of this kind of testimony by Dr. Quijano. Also, we have reviewed the cases of all inmates currently scheduled for execution and none of those involves this kind of testimony by Dr. Quijano.

"Additionally, local prosecutors have been advised to review their cases that have not yet reached the attorney general's office."

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